

KHASI SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

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which I described previously, where a man brings his secondary wives to his first wife's house in which he is acting as the head. Furthermore, sororal polygyny is prohibited, while it was preferred among the Garo in terms of wives taken from the same *makari*, though mostly not real sisters. The strong jealousy, which I observed, among the Khasi wives of a polygynist, would appear to make such polygynous marriages with closely related women practically impossible. As shown in List 6 & 9 every single one of the wives of each polygynist belongs to different *law*, and the two secondary wives of the man of Kongton came from neighbouring villages.

These aspects of Khasi polygyny are related fundamentally to the underlying Khasi social structure. It should be remembered that every married woman has her independent household, *iing*, and that two women of different descent groups never reside together (see p. 127). The picture is one of every married woman holding a key-point in the whole network of the social system, and men fit into this network with much flexibility. The strong stability of women and the fluid nature of men in terms of residence naturally produces this form of polygyny. This analogy is also true of lovers' relations and illegal marriages. Though polygyny is a rapidly decreasing institution all over the Khasi Hills, cases of lovers' relations and illegal marriages are found to be very numerous among the Khasi, as compared with neighbouring tribes and peoples in Assam.

Throughout my discussions of various forms of Khasi marriage, I found men to be more or less in the position wittily described by one of them as "having one leg in my sister's house, the other in my wife's," except in cases of the husband/father who succeeds in establishing paternal authority, as in marriages with a non-heiress. Even in the latter a man might have a period of uncertainty until his children were born and until the economic basis for his matrimonial life was firmly established. For the rest, Khasi men would be in the position of either becoming the authority of an *iing*, or swinging between their sister and their wife, which may produce more opportunities for lovers' relations. One of a man's legs is certainly always found in his sister's house, the other may rest in his wife's, but it may also rest in another woman's house. The wife being rather accustomed to his occasional absence due to his visits to his sister's house, another kind of absence does not mark any great change from the usual situation, at least not physically. Such situations occur particularly in the earlier stage of the marriage, as a sort of continuation of premarital affairs, which are quite freely practised: it is a usual custom before marriage for young men to sleep at a girl's house whom they like though they say sexual intercourse usually does not take place in such cases. This I observed in Sohkynduh and Kongton.

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THE KHASIAS.

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strip of fine silk for the loins, a part of which hangs gracefully as low 291
as the calves in front. No notice is here taken of what has
undoubtedly been added and borrowed from their more civilised
neighbours in the plains.

'MARRIAGE. — The marriageable age for females is from 15 to 58
18; for males, from 18 to 24. Matrimonial alliances are con-
tracted either through the parents or the living representatives of
the families to which the parties belong. The mode of procedure
is still very primitive and unceremonious. The bridegroom,
escorted by a number of friends and relatives, goes to the house
of the bride, where all are feasted and lodged for the night; on the
morrow he leads the bride, accompanied by a number of her
relatives, to his own house, and entertains the company with dishes
of boiled rice and fresh pork. After remaining there a day or two, 591
the newly-married couple return together to the house of the wife,
which becomes their future home. Marriage is dissoluble by 586
regular divorce, for any sufficient cause, and often without any
assignable reason except mutual dislike or want of issue, the latter
being the most common case of all. Marriage with the Khásia [581]
is simply a conventional arrangement, with nothing further for its
object than the procreation of children; failing that, it is no longer
looked upon as a contract permanently binding. Divorce is effected
in the presence of eye-witnesses—the parents, or the heads of clans.
Five cowries (*Asarls*) are produced by the parties and exchanged,
then cast away by mutual consent, and the ceremony is over.
Parties once divorced can never again contract marriage with 587
each other, but they are at liberty to marry into other families.
Polygamy, strictly so called, is not sanctioned by Khásia custom. 595
Adultery is looked upon as a serious crime. If the five cowries 837
have not been cast away by mutual consent, both husband
and wife are held to be subject to the "matrimonial demon;"
and even when either dies in wedlock, the survivor is not at 587
liberty to contract a fresh alliance until he or she pays the family
a sum of money as the means of removing the surviving party
from subjection to the "matrimonial demon." The husband is a 593
stranger, so to speak, in the family he has entered, and perpetuates 611
the race of others, not his own. The children in all questions of
lineage and personal rights follow the mother. There are always
two interests in the same family—that of the husband, and that of
the wife. Whatever the husband may have earned or acquired in 593
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